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COMMAND AND CONTROL METHODOLOGY: A SLIDING  
SCALE OF CENTRALIZATION

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

DAVID J. LEMELIN, JR., MAJ, USA  
B.S., United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, 1983

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas  
1996

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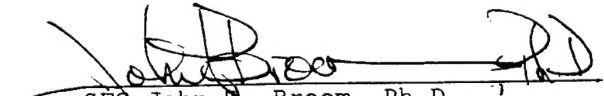
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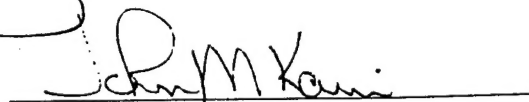
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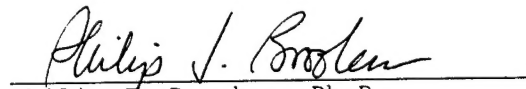
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## ABSTRACT

COMMAND AND CONTROL METHODOLOGY: A Sliding Scale of Centralization by  
MAJ David J. Lemelin, Jr., USA, 80 pages.

This study analyzes the dichotomy between the Army's doctrinal espousal of mission orders and its practices of detailed orders, then proposes a hypothesis for its resolution. The hypothesis proposes that command methodologies are not discrete styles or techniques to be applied institutionally or by individual commander. Rather, mission orders, directive control, detailed orders, etc., are points on a scale of centralization. A commander, during the course of an operation will transition up and down that scale based on changes in a set of situational factors. Those factors are derivatives of the ubiquitous mission, enemy, troops available, terrain, and time (METT-T).

This study provides historical support for this hypothesis through a series of vignettes. These vignettes demonstrate how each METT-T factor affects the level of centralization individually and collectively. Included are two vignettes that demonstrate the difference between the leadership philosophy of *Auftragstaktik* and command methodology in terms of centralization.

The study concludes that, indeed, command is a sliding scale of centralization. The apparent dichotomy between Army practice and doctrine is a result of the doctrinal and institutional misunderstanding of the nature of command methodology.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The central idea of command and control comes from doctrine, which to be sound must be based on the principles of war, and which to be effective must be elastic enough to admit of mutation in accordance with change in circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

J. F. C. Fuller, The Generalship of Alexander the Great

A fundamental axiom of successful war fighting is to be superior in strength at the decisive point. Much of military theory is an attempt to formulate methods for commanders to achieve this tactically ideal endstate. Liddell Hart, for example, calls this ideal "concentration" and goes further to state that this one concept sums up all the other principles of war.<sup>2</sup> Effective command and control is the key to concentration. In fact, the whole art of command may be said to be the ability to manipulate one's own forces to be stronger where it counts, thus rendering the overall combat-power ratio irrelevant.

Since World War I, military writers have debated what styles of warfare best allow a commander to achieve concentration at the decisive point and thus ultimate tactical success. The most prolific and influential of these writers and theorists, Fuller, Liddell Hart, Simpkin, and Guderian among them, espoused a style of war fighting that can loosely be described as "maneuver" warfare. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the U.S. Army and the U.S. Marine Corps, in response to several stimuli, doctrinally adopted this "maneuver" theory. This adoption was tacit in the Army's case and explicit in the Marines'.

Commensurate with the institutional acceptance of maneuver-style warfare, was the establishment of "mission-type control" as put forward by maneuver theorists, as the "official" command style or method for the operational control of maneuver warfare.

"Mission-type control" or, alternately, "mission-order tactics" is a very decentralized approach to command and control. It emphasizes freedom of action at the lowest levels, thus maximizing individual leader initiative in the face of confusing and unpredicted events on the battlefield. Ostensibly, this style of command melds perfectly with the alleged tendency of American leaders' toward independent action and improvisation. For these and other cogent reasons, "mission-order tactics" has become the doctrinally preferred command style for both the ground combat services.

In practice, however, since the official adoption of "mission-order tactics," Army tactical leaders have been using the antithesis of mission orders, "control by detailed order" or "detailed-order tactics," almost uniformly in both simulated combat at the combat training centers (CTCs) and in actual combat operations. This schism between doctrine and practice has, over the last ten years or so, resulted in a tremendous amount of analysis and criticism. Despite the volumes of monographs, white papers, after-action reports, "lessons-learned" documents, and articles in professional journals, the disparity between doctrinal and practical command and control remains exacerbates the already difficult problem of the Army's ability to understand and practice its own doctrine.

Most of the aforementioned analyses berate Army tactical leaders for not practicing mission tactics properly or at all. The underlying assumptions by most professional writers on this subject are: first, that mission-order tactics are the only acceptable method for controlling

maneuver warfare; and that these writers assume that Army tactical leaders fail to practice mission-order tactics out of either ignorance or personal bias toward "micromanagement." These analysts' interchangeable use of the nonsynonymous terms "mission-order tactics" and the German *Auftragstaktik* further confuses the issue. The debate over the apparent dichotomy between theory and practice has reached an impasse. Mission-order tactics are continually held forth by theorists as the "holy grail" of command and control yet; well-read, well-trained, and open-minded tactical leaders still command predominantly through "detailed-order tactics."

That this number of commanders and leaders is incapable of reading and applying doctrine is a supposition that is a bit incredible. The problem is more likely to lie in the fundamental concepts and doctrine themselves. To paraphrase General Dupuy's famous dictum, if more than one-half of the Army cannot grasp the doctrine, then it is time to reevaluate the doctrine. In fact, we must reassess this whole issue by posing a fundamental question: Are command and control styles such as detailed-order tactics and mission-order tactics, not discrete and exclusive methods at all, but rather specific points along a sliding-scale? This scale is a measure of the degree of centralization or, more precisely, the level of the commander's operational control for a particular operation. Emphasis on unity of effort is at one end and emphasis on subordinate initiative on the other, as pictured below:

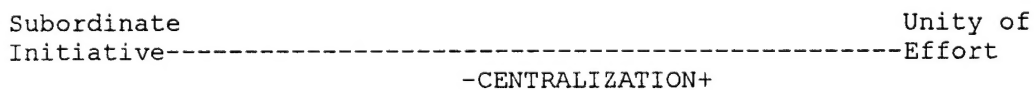


Figure 1. Centralization Continuum

All command and control methods would be points along this scale, "Loose-reins" methods would be toward the left, and "tight-reins" methods toward the right end of the scale.

Given this depiction, a commander would start an operation at some point on the scale and might move either up or down the scale during that same operation. If, indeed, this scale is more accurate description of the relationship between command and control styles, then two other related questions must be addressed in addition to the central question. First and closest to the main question is: What factors must a commander analyze to determine with what degree of centralization to start an operation? Second, what changes in these factors would require the commander to shift up or down the scale during an operation? This thesis will focus on resolving these questions.

As a long-time student of military history, I have studied the command styles of many successful and unsuccessful military leaders. I have found a central theme of command throughout history to be the quest for the optimal degree of centralization in order to achieve relatively superior mass at the decisive point. As a tactic's instructor, I have grappled with the inconsistencies and vagaries of doctrine in many areas, but especially in its failure to articulate the fundamentals of command and control. In the classroom, then, I often determine appropriate methods of command and control in each situation. As a combat arm's officer with extensive company command experience, including command in combat operations, I have seen personally the problems of both overly centralized operations and, conversely, overly decentralized operations.

I have also participated in the Marine Corps recent journalistic debate over the same issue. The Marines, in their doctrine have very clearly articulated their institutional choice of command and control methods-mission-order tactics. However, in practice they found

themselves contrarily centralizing command and control during tactical operations. The resultant debate in the *Marine Corps Gazette* amplified the same issue for the Army. This thesis then, is the culmination of my long interest in and study of this critical problem.

### Definitions

As the problem revolves around understanding of terms and their definitions, it is critical to establish a semantic baseline.

### Command and Control

Literally volumes are available on the subject of what comprises command and control. In an ever increasing effort to articulate the subordinate tasks that make up the concept of command, modern militaries use increasingly long terms and acronyms for description. Command and control, implies that one could command without controlling a military organization. Command, control and communications has a similar implication regarding communications. Expanding acronyms such as command, control, communications and intelligence (C<sup>3</sup>I) and even command, control, communications, computers, information and intelligence (C<sup>4</sup>I<sup>2</sup>), take this trend into the near-absurd realm. Martin van Creveld in his work Command in War says that the function that must be exercised continuously if the army is to operate is simply "command." He thenceforth dispenses with any other terms or acronyms as being redundant. Van Creveld's assertion is that control, communications, etc., are imbedded functions of command and only that single word is necessary is a valid premise.<sup>3</sup> We will follow his lead in that regard henceforth as much as possible.

FM 101-5-1, Operational Terms and Symbols (1985), defines command and control as:

The exercise of command that is the process through which the through which the activities of military forces are directed,



coordinated and controlled to accomplish the mission. This process encompasses the personnel, equipment, communications, facilities and procedures necessary to gather and analyze information, to plan for what is to be done, and to supervise the execution of operations.<sup>4</sup>

This is an adequate, albeit a bit mechanical, definition. For our purposes it is important to highlight that command is uniquely concerned with the processes of planning and execution.

Clausewitz in both On War and his treatise Principles of War emphasizes the supreme importance of command in war. Further, he states that the purposes of theory, organization, and the function of command is to "discover how we may gain a preponderance of physical forces and material advantages at the decisive point."<sup>5</sup> Both Sun Tzu and Liddell Hart echo this fundamental truth and add the concept of concentrating "moral forces" as well as physical ones.

Archduke Charles, Bonaparte's nemesis and student, encapsulates the purpose of command by stating that success in command is "only to be obtained by simultaneous efforts, directed upon a given point, sustained with constancy, and executed with decision."<sup>6</sup>

We have established, then, a definition of command and synopsized the ultimate aim of command as the achievement of superior concentration relative to the enemy at the decisive point. Further, the concept of centralization or the level of a commander's operational control is imbedded in the term command and is that particular part of the command function, the understanding of which that is at the center of the issue.

#### Methods of Command

Central to the problem is the business of command methodology or "styles" of command. The late Brigadier Richard E. Simpkin, a World War Two veteran of the Royal Tank Regiment, in his work Human Factors in

Mechanized Warfare defined several methods of command with "degree of tightness" as the chief variable. His terms have become standard for theory and doctrine writers, especially in the U.S. and Great Britain. Understanding Simpkin's definitions of the methods of command is an essential starting point for the resolution of our problem. The below methods are taken verbatim from Simpkin's book and listed in order of increasing centralization.

Directive Control - as favored by the U.S. and BAOR in the tactical nuclear heyday of the fifties and sixties, in which the subordinate is left to interpret a directive stating his superior's mission.

Mission-type Control - as preached by the Bundeswehr, in which a statement of the superior's mission is amplified by spelling out the subordinate's mission and the constraints under which he must execute it.

Forward Command - as practiced by the Wehrmacht's *Panzertruppen* in which the senior commander issues orders based on direct observation and may actually assume command of a lower formation or unit at the crux of an operation.

Detailed-order Tactics - as preferred (more or less discreetly) by the American and British Armies and increasingly favored by the Soviets, in which every least move is dictated or at least influenced from the highest level practicable.<sup>7</sup>

Note that Simpkin (as do many others, as we shall see) classifies the approach to command of entire militaries under one or another of these headings. Clearly, he viewed these methods as distinct and discrete and not as a spectrum.

#### *Auftragstaktik*

As alluded to earlier, this German term is often misused and misunderstood. Loosely translated, it means "mission-order tactics" in English. However, this simple direct translation is inadequate to express the larger concept implied by the term. From the mid-nineteenth century to the end of World War II, *Auftragstaktik* was the Prussian/German military's cultural *modus operandi*. It was the overarching process by which German military leaders were schooled,

trained and evaluated during operations. *Auftragstaktik* defined the relationship of senior and subordinate at all echelons. The purpose of such an inculcated system was to ensure that decisions on the battlefield would be made at the lowest possible level. This concept derives from the Clauswitzian understanding that on the battlefield unpredicted events will inevitably occur. Such events are best handled by the leader on the scene within the framework of the larger scheme of the higher commander.

*Auftragstaktik* is not, in and of itself, a method of command and control. Simpkin spends a good deal of his work Race To The Swift, in concluding that "directive control" was in fact the method of command and control at the core of *Auftragstaktik*. The U.S. Marines, in their keystone manual Warfighting which is an institutional espousal of *Auftragstaktik*, state that the appropriate method of command is "mission tactics."<sup>8</sup> Much analysis in succeeding chapters will review the U.S. Army's and Marines' interpretation of *Auftragstaktik*. For definitional purposes it is critical to understand that *Auftragstaktik* is not solely a method of commanding units in the field.

#### *Befehlstaktik*

This is another German term that has recently gained some notice. Translated it means tactics through detailed orders. The concept is most akin to Simpkins' "detailed-order tactics." While *Auftragstaktik* defines an entire military culture, *befehlstaktik* is simply a method of command. As we shall demonstrate, *befehlstaktik* is not the antithesis of, nor, incompatible with, *Auftragstaktik*.

#### Maneuver Warfare

This term implies an approach to battle that emphasizes the moral or psychological aspects of warfare. It is not a new concept or theory.

The coining of the term by William Lind and others was a reaction by many military thinkers to an "attrition-oriented" approach to war. Maneuver warfare is a philosophy that espouses a return to common sense. The idea is to maneuver forces for maximum moral effect, that is, positional and psychological advantage, before having to "close" with the enemy. In the event, as Bonaparte understood, the moral is to the physical as is three to one.

Here, again, we see the influence of the German tradition in modern military theory. Many theorists and historians credit Basil Liddell Hart and the German General Staff for the championing a return to this basic truth of human conflict reaction to the attrition-based war on the Western Front in 1917. Stormtroop-tactics, *Blitzkrieg*, "surfaces and gaps," the "indirect approach" and even AirLand Battle tactics (to a degree) are manifestations of the age old warfighting concept of maneuver first, fight second. As usual, Sun Tzu was there first with a pithy summation of maneuver warfare theory:

Supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting. Thus the highest form of generalship is to balk the enemy's plans; the next best is to prevent the junction of the enemy's forces; the next in order is to attack the enemy's army in the field: the worst policy of all is to besiege walled cities.<sup>9</sup>

Before leaving maneuver warfare, it is important to note that many modern theorists and doctrine writers assign "mission-type control" or "directive control," a la Simpkin, as the method of command for maneuver warfare. Many even use the term *Auftragstaktik* as if it were a synonym for, or as the command method of, maneuver warfare. This basic confusion of terms and concepts is fundamental to our problem.

#### Attrition Warfare

This term implies the antithesis of maneuver warfare. This style of fighting emphasizes physical destruction of the enemy as a means to

his psychological destruction and not the reverse. Success in attrition warfare is often based solely on a ratio of enemy versus friendly systems and personnel destroyed. Modern maneuver warfare theory is based on a reaction to what some theorists saw as a trend toward "attritionism" in U.S. Army and Marine Corps doctrine and practice in the 1960s and 1970s. Maneuver warfare theorists correctly pointed out that if the NATO forces were as outnumbered as they were by the Warsaw Pact, then attrition warfare was doomed to failure and an approach to war that sought to mitigate the disparity of number was more appropriate. To see evidence that this trend toward attritionism is still prevalent, one need only to look at the use of casualty ratios as a measure of success at the Combat Training Centers (CTC) and for any unit exercise simulated on computers.

#### Limitations and Delimitations

For the purposes of this thesis, we will accept two basic truths. The first is that the U.S. Army and Marines have adopted some form of maneuver warfare as doctrine. Volumes have been written on the development of FM 100-5 and FMFM 1 in the 1970s and 1980s. These same volumes clearly establish the link between modern American doctrine, British and German post-World War I theory, the German concept of *Auftragstaktik* and maneuver warfare theory. Further, both Army and Marines have also adopted some form of "directive control" or "mission-type control" as their institutional command method for their versions of maneuver warfare.

The second truth, again ably demonstrated in several works, is that there is a considerable divergence in command methodology between theory and practice. This problem is as evident today as it was when the new doctrine was adopted. The Army continues to expend a great deal of institutional energy on attempting to resolve this issue. The attempts

at resolution, however, castigate practitioners for not following doctrine or the doctrine for being inflexible. As this thesis will show, however, the root of the problem lies in a theoretical misconception of command methodology.

This thesis, then will be limited to a reexamination of the sources of current doctrine to demonstrate the misinterpretation of command methodology and of the doctrine itself to show its failure to adequately explain any command method, let alone the whole concept of centralization. This thesis will not review the history of *Auftragstaktik* nor the development of FM 100-5 and Airland Battle Doctrine. It will, instead, be confined to a cursory review of maneuver theory and detailed historical examples to demonstrate that indeed, command is a sliding scale of centralization or operational control dependent on a series of ever-changing situational factors.

Pivotal to understanding the problem and the hypothesis is a review of the literature pertaining to the issue of command methodology. Chapter 2 will synopsise theoretical and doctrinal sources as well as the most salient articles from military journals. Further, this chapter will summarize the many theses and monographs integral to this issue. An understanding of the literature of this problem is essential to understanding the nature of the problem itself.

Chapter 3 will introduce, in detail, the hypothesis of command's "sliding scale" of centralization. This chapter will also explain the factors involved in determining the level of centralization for a particular combat operation and when and why changes in those factors should case a commensurate shift in the level of control within that operation.

Chapter 4 will provide historical vignettes to demonstrate the "sliding" nature of command methodology. This chapter will illustrate

each of the factors that a commander must consider when he determines his level of centralization through historical examples. In each vignette one or another of the factors will dominate a particular commander's analysis. This chapter will demonstrate the validity of the hypothesis when applied to actual combat situations.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of *Auftragstaktik* has greatly influenced current Army doctrine. Chapter 5 will briefly revisit the source of this concept and demonstrate how the fundamental misunderstanding of this concept has affected Army doctrine. Two historical examples from the chief practitioners of *Auftragstaktik*, the World War II German Wehrmacht, will illustrate that *Auftragstaktik* encompasses the entire scale of centralization in its approach to command.

The concluding chapter will provide a recommendation for improving the Army's keystone doctrinal manuals as a means to resolving this issue. Additionally, this chapter will discuss the concept of commander's intent, central to Army command methodology, and how, when coupled with an overall understanding of centralization and operational control, commander's intent will allow commanders to properly and effectively execute Army doctrine.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The worst I can say of the Yankees is that they took their soldiering seriously and seemed to be under the impression that they had invented it.<sup>1</sup>

George MacDonald Fraser, Flashman and the Mountain of Light

A great deal of the military literature regarding the nature of command and control influencing U.S. military doctrine originates outside of the United States. The problem of comprehending the nature of command requires an understanding of that influential literature as well as the analyses and interpretations of it by U.S. doctrine writers and theorists. The foundations of the problem that this thesis attempts to resolve can be partially established through a review of the relevant literature.

As intimated earlier, much has been written not only on the subject of doctrine, maneuver warfare theory and command methodology, but also on the subject of the U.S. Army's inability or unwillingness to use decentralized mission-order tactics. The relevant literature can be divided into five categories. The first category includes the historical sources of modern doctrine and theory. This category also includes some fundamental research that is the source of controversy regarding the deviation of Army practice from doctrine. The second category is the doctrine itself and related analyses of its development. The third category consists of the works, published and unpublished, of the "maneuverists": those modern theorists so influential on command

philosophy and doctrine. The fourth category consists of works by military analysts, some of whom also appear in other categories, who advocate mission orders or directive control to the exclusion of any other method--"mission-orders a *outrance*," if you will. The last and smallest category consists of articles and other works by military analysts who make a case for detailed orders, as practiced by the U.S. Army, as being compatible with maneuver doctrine. This category is labeled "The Heretics."

#### The Sources

The works most influential to modern military theory and the concept of maneuver warfare are the writings of Sun Tzu, Sir Basil Liddell Hart, William Lind and those members of the German General Staff collectively known as the "German school." Sun Tzu is significant because in the search for solutions to the attrition-war of WWI, many theorists, including Liddell Hart, found answers in the simple, eloquent and long-overlooked On War. Liddell Hart's numerous post-WWI writings coupled with the concept of *Auftragstaktik*, established by von Moltke in the 1850's heavily influenced the German theory of command in war. German theory, interpreted after World War II, and William Lind's relatively recent amplification of its precepts have heavily influenced both Marine and Army doctrine.

In On War, Sun Tzu, like Clausewitz in his similarly titled work, emphasizes that the moral or psychological aspects of war are infinitely more important to success in battle than are the physical aspects. According to Sun Tzu, maneuver should look for enemy weakness and avoid strength. Maneuvering to a position of advantage is essential to establishing the conditions for successful subsequent closing with the

enemy. "The skillful leader subdues the enemy's troops without any fighting."<sup>2</sup>

Sun Tzu advocated a flexible command style in his maneuver warfare theory. Centralization was a function of each individual subordinate: "The clever commander looks to the effect of combined energy, and does not require too much from individuals. He takes individual talent into account, and uses each leader according to his capabilities."<sup>3</sup>

Liddell Hart, writing after World War I in an attempt to remedy the "war without maneuver," revisited many of the concepts espoused centuries earlier by Sun Tzu. Prominent among his many works is Strategy, which is an exhaustive look at the value of avoiding strength and attacking weakness; the "indirect approach" as he phrased it.

His 1921 article entitled "The 'Man-in-the-Dark' Theory of Infantry Tactics and the 'Expanding Torrent' System of Attack" espouses the idea of fluid, high-tempo operations that rely on maneuver to gain psychological and positional advantage over an enemy. Liddell Hart also advocates in this article an extremely decentralized approach to the command and control of these storm troop style operations. Liddell Hart felt blanketly that these type operations would be too rapid in their development to be adequately controlled by one central commander. Liddell Hart's theories have heavily influenced modern Marine Corps doctrine and indirectly and to a lesser extent influenced Army doctrine.

The German approach to command and war in general has had a tremendous impact on U.S. doctrine and theory. From Clausewitz through the great von Moltke, von Schlieffen and von Seeckt, the German General Staff has contributed volumes to our subject. However, the most signal document, at least in terms of influence on modern command theory, is the 1933 version of Truppenfuhrung. This document expounds the German theory

of command and encompasses the collective thought of over 100 years of practice and study. It was first translated by the Command and Staff College in 1936 and has had considerable influence ever since.

One oft-quoted passage, which paraphrases one of the elder von Moltke's dictums, is the following: "An order shall contain all that is necessary for the lower commander to know in order for him to execute independently his task. It should contain no more."<sup>4</sup> Many maneuver theorists and doctrine writers have latched on to this as a validation of the concept that all operations should employ mission-orders and decentralized control. Chapter four will examine this passage in context and review the German School in general to check the validity of the Maneuverists' conclusion.

William Lind's Maneuver Warfare Handbook was published in the early 1980s. It is a compilation of articles and lectures by Lind and others primarily in the Marine Corps community. The concepts are not unique, in fact they include ideas from all the sources listed above. However, they are here put together in a convincing package. Lind generated tremendous controversy in both the Marine Corps and the Army. Nonetheless, "his" concepts are manifest in modern command doctrine of both services.

Lind's overarching theory mirrors both Liddell Hart and the "German School." That is, rapid maneuver avoiding enemy strengths and targeting his weaknesses in the way to defeat an enemy while minimizing friendly losses. Like the *Truppenfuhrung*, Lind espouses mission orders. Again, as with the *Truppenfuhrung*, doctrine writers have grasped certain passages out of context and drawn significant doctrinal conclusions.

The U.S. Army Command and Staff College (CGSC) has generated some fundamental research into the problem of command in theory and practice. The two seminal theses are Antal's "Combat Orders: An Analysis of the

Combat Orders Process" and J. D. Johnson's "Mission Orders in the United States Army." Antal's work is a near exhaustive study of the linkage between modern U.S. command doctrine and the German theory. Antal concludes that mission-orders are the optimal goal of all Army operations and he supports this conclusion with excellent research.

Antal reaches two significant conclusions. The first is one of the premises of this thesis, that is, that current Army doctrine does not adequately define mission tactics or mission-type orders with the result that commanders cannot execute their own doctrine. His second conclusion is that; "Mission tactics are the preferred method of waging maneuver warfare. Time is always critical and mission type orders save time."<sup>5</sup>

Johnson's work includes a survey of Army tactical leaders canvassing whether or not they understand the Army command doctrine of decentralized mission-order tactics and whether or not they employ this method of command. His conclusions firmly establish that commanders are well versed in doctrine but do not practice mission-order tactics. Johnson does not question the validity of the use of mission type orders, rather he states the need for better education in how to use this command method.

Several other monographs, written between 1986 and the present at Fort Leavenworth support both Antal's and Johnson's conclusions. It is important to note the collective tend to discuss command methods as discrete types and advocate them as an "either-or" proposition. Chapter three will establish that this trend is essentially the logical error of the "false dilemma."

#### The Doctrine

The most important doctrinal manuals to consider are the 1976, 1982, 1986, and 1993 versions of Field Manual (FM) 100-5, Operations, and

the 1989 FMFM 1, Warfighting, and its companion, FMFM 1-3, Tactics. These manuals, in varying degrees of clarity, espouse some form of maneuver warfare and mission-order tactics as the command method for both the Army and Marines respectively. However, these manuals do not explain the concept of command methodology in general.

FM 100-5, as it was originally intended, is the Army's keystone manual. As originally conceived, it was to be an American version of the *Truppenfuhrung*. Paul Herbert's Leavenworth paper, Deciding What Has to Be Done and Romjue's monograph From Active Defense to Airland Battle analyze and survey the development of the Army's doctrine and command methodology as espoused in FM 100-5 and the "nested" subordinate-echelon manuals in great detail. Both theses accurately trace the German influence on American army doctrine. Romjue further establishes Lind's impact on the 1982 and subsequent versions of FM 100-5. These two works clearly establish the impact of maneuver theory (and mission-order tactics as its preferred command method) on Army doctrine.

The current 1993 version of FM 100-5 tries to do too much as a keystone manual and as such is disjointed, often full of "buzzwords" and fails to provide a coherent sourcebook for U.S. Army warfighting philosophy. In its section on "battle command" (the new term for command and control, one wonders why "command" requires an adjectival specification) states: "In battle, battle command requires the decentralization of decision authority to the lowest practical level."<sup>6</sup> While this sentence sounds reasonable, the manual does not go further to explain how one determines the "lowest practical level." The tone of the rest of the passages on the nature of command, scattered throughout the manual and not particularly coherent, is that mission-order tactics are the preferred method.

As intimated earlier, subordinate echelon manuals are derivative from the keystone, FM 100-5. Several, including FM 7-20, The Infantry Battalion, state specifically that Army doctrine "requires mission tactics."<sup>7</sup> However, no manual describes "mission tactics" or "mission orders" in the context of command methodology. They use Simpkin's terms without his analysis or explanations.

Another important Army document that is "nested" in FM 100-5 is the CGSC Student Text (ST) 101-5, Command and Staff Decision Processes. This text and its precursor ST 100-9, The Tactical Decision Making Process, are interim documents for use at the Command and General Staff College and by units in the field to explain the tactical problem solving process. In its introductory chapter, entitled "Command and Control," the 1994 version of ST 100-5 illustrates the misunderstanding of command methodology in toto. In this chapter, the authors have reproduced Simpkin's list of command methods (see chapter 1). The only explanation of the list is the following: "The commander's methodology, or the way he normally approaches decision making is known as his philosophy of command. There are many recognized philosophies of command."<sup>8</sup> The authors of this very important and widely used manual have reduced command methodology to a matter of the commander's personal preference.

Marine Corps doctrine, while not central to the problem at hand which is essentially an Army issue, is nonetheless important to examine as it parallels the Army's embracing of maneuver warfare only in a much more specific and consistent manner. The keystone Marine manuals are FMFM 1, Warfighting, FMFM 1-2, Campaigning, and FMFM 1-3, Tactics. Together these manuals are an exceptionally well-written description of the nature of combat in general and a primer for maneuver warfare specifically. In contrast to FM 100-5, these manuals are clear and



provide a warfighting philosophy easily understandable by the lowest-level leader.

Relying heavily on Liddell Hart and Simpkin, the Marines explicitly state that their command method is mission tactics. They qualify this method selection with the following:

It is obvious that we cannot allow decentralized initiative without some means of providing unity or focus to the various efforts. To do so would be to dissipate our strength. We seek unity, not through imposed control, but harmonious initiative.<sup>9</sup>

The manual does not define harmonious initiative, but this caveat to their espousal of mission tactics points up the fundamental problem of regarding command methods as distinct and separate. That is, as outlined in chapter 1, that concentration at the decisive point, the ultimate aim of any commander, requires unity of effort at some point in the operation. Mission order tactics, as defined by Simpkin, the Marines and others do not allow for centralized operations when they are required, the rather amorphous concept of harmonious initiative notwithstanding.

#### The Maneuverists

Several military analysts have written profoundly on the concept of maneuver warfare. Richard Simpkin, William Lind, and Robert Leonhard have written descriptive and analytic works on the subject. Simpkin and Lind's works have been discussed in detail previously. Leonhard's book The Art of Maneuver compares Army operations in peace and war to its doctrine and maneuver warfare theory. He makes a compelling case for maneuver warfare, an Army version of the Marines' keystone manuals, if you will. He concludes that in many areas the Army does not practice its own maneuver doctrine and he goes on to give potential solutions to this problem. We will revisit this work in an upcoming paragraph.

### Mission-Orders a Outrance

The vast majority of other military writers on modern doctrine and maneuver warfare clearly advocate directive control or mission-order tactics as the approved method of command for maneuver warfare. John Antal, A. M. Gray, and John Schmitt add their voices to Liddell Hart, Simpkin, and Lind in espousing the primacy of directive control to successful maneuver warfare. Antal has written several articles in addition to his previously mentioned monograph, making a strong case for decentralized methods of command and the concept of *Auftragstaktik*. Gray and Schmitt are the authors of FMFM 1, Warfighting, and have written numerous articles in professional journals. They are the most prolific and articulate of many professional soldier-scholars who champion directive control and condemn the Army for its failure to follow its own doctrine and continually use detailed orders as a command method.

Among the many articles alluded to earlier is Schmitt's article "Out of Synch with Maneuver Warfare" which appeared in the *Marine Corps Gazette* in August 1994. In this article Schmitt berates a previous author's attempt to establish the U.S. Army's use of detailed orders as acceptable in maneuver warfare. Schmitt concludes that anyone who thinks that these things are compatible clearly does not understand maneuver warfare.

### The Heretics

This small category of military writers have reexamined maneuver warfare and have seen the difficulty of concentration without some degree of centralization. They have postulated that other command methods may not only be compatible with maneuver warfare, but preferable in the U.S. Army's conduct of its operations. This category includes Robert Leonhard, George Eisel, and Kenneth McKenzie. These analysts have

written several works challenging mission-order tactics as the only appropriate command method for the Army and Marines. Leonhard in Art of Maneuver states that *Befelstaktik* is acceptable in maneuver warfare and may even be more appropriate for the Army. Eisel takes a similar stance in his 1992 monograph "Befelstaktik and the Red Army Experience: Are There Lessons For US?."

It is important to note that all the analysts discussed to this point have considered command methods discrete and exclusive. Kenneth McKenzie, another of the Heretics, a Marine Corps officer wrote an article entitled, "They Shoot Synchronizers Don't They" in the August 1994 *Marine Corps Gazette*. This article concludes that the selection of command methods for maneuver warfare may not be an "either-or" proposition. He goes further to state the possibility that commanders may have to use more than one method in certain circumstances. For the first time in recent literature the fundamental nature of command methodology is called into question.

In conclusion, this review of pertinent literature has assisted in defining the problem. Moreover, much of the cited literature has contributed toward or is central to the dichotomy between Army doctrine and practice. Further, we have seen the linkage between early maneuver warfare theorists and modern doctrine. Finally, and most significantly we have seen the tacit assumption by all but the most recent writers that command methods are separate and distinct and that a particular army, commander or philosophy of war has a particular, compatible command methodology. The next chapter will detail the hypothesis briefly described in the first chapter. Understanding this "sliding scale" view of command methodology is essential to understanding that maneuver warfare as practiced by the Army and Marines requires shifts in centralization as the particular situation develops.

## CHAPTER 3

### AN HYPOTHESIS

The supreme task of an effective command consists in maintaining the dispersed state of the masses while at the same time preserving the possibility of time concentration. For that there are a few general rules; the problem in each case will be a different one.<sup>1</sup>

von Moltke, Moltke on the Art of War

It is a recurrent theme of military doctrine and theory that battlefield success comes from concentration at the decisive point. The doctrines of the U.S. Marines and the British Army are unique in their emphasis on concentration as one of only two (three in the British Army) recognized principles of war.<sup>2</sup> Clausewitz, not surprisingly, anticipates modern doctrine by stating in On War that the principle of concentration "underlies all planning and serves to guide all other consideration."<sup>3</sup> Liddell Hart, the doctrinal progenitor of both the Marines and the British Army, states emphatically in his 1944 Thoughts on War that "The principles of war could, for brevity, be condensed into a single word-- 'concentration'."<sup>4</sup>

The Marine Corps' keystone manual FMFM-1, Warfighting, defines concentration as "the convergence of effort in time and space. It is the means by which we develop superiority at the decisive time and place."<sup>5</sup> The U.S. Army's current doctrine has, as one of its tenets (a tenet being something akin to a principle of war), the concept of synchronization. FM 100-5, Operations, defines synchronization as "arranging activities in time and space to mass at the decisive point."<sup>6</sup> Clearly, then, the notion

of concentrating ones' combat power at the decisive point is a central pillar in the doctrines of both American ground combat forces.

In Chapter one we established that one of the prime tasks of a commander, if not the prime task, was to effect this concentration on the battlefield. Indeed, one of the commander's chief responsibilities is to ensure unity of effort by providing priorities and focus for all unit activities throughout the planning, preparation and execution phases of every operation. The need for unity of effort, that is the combining of the effects of multiple subordinate elements at the decisive place and time, varies according to the situation.

Subordinate initiative is another concept historically proven to be crucial on the battlefield. In this instance we do not mean 'initiative' in the sense that the attacker generally has the initiative because he sets the terms for battle. Rather, initiative is meant in the individual sense. The elder von Moltke explains subordinate "initiative" and emphasizes its criticality in the following:

A favourable situation will never be exploited if commanders wait for orders. The highest commander and the youngest soldier must always be conscious of the fact that omission and inactivity are worse than resorting to the wrong expedient.<sup>7</sup>

Mission-order tactics or directive control as a command methodology maximizes the freedom of action or initiative of subordinate leaders. The exponents of maneuver warfare, who are also, as previously seen, the authors of much modern doctrine and theory, state that only through minimizing the details of the orders given to subordinates can a commander ensure success on an ever-changing and largely unpredictable battlefield. In fact, control by detailed order is seen by maneuverists and military leaders as stifling to subordinate initiative and potentially disastrous.

The conflict in modern doctrine and maneuver theory is clear. In order to concentrate forces, the commander must restrict subordinate initiative and emphasize unity of effort. Conversely, by limiting the details of an order and maximizing subordinate initiative, a commander risks his ability to concentrate combat power and unify the effects of his forces when necessary. Modern doctrine, both U.S. Army and Marine Corps, does not adequately explain this conflict, let alone assist the commander in its resolution.

The debate in the Army between theory and practice as described in the preceding chapters is essentially: "Emphasis on initiative always as doctrine and theory dictate?" or "Emphasis on unity of effort always as experience in the field calls for?" The choice facing the commander is seemingly almost a "no win" situation. It is in reality a false dilemma. In every situation, the commander does indeed have other options in terms of the level of centralization.

While the achieving of unity of effort of subordinates and the emphasizing of subordinate initiative are indeed competing requirements made of the commander, the art of command is, in fact, the attainment of the proper balance between the two. Recalling the graphic scale of centralization in figure 1, with "Unity of Effort" on one end and "Subordinate Initiative" on the other. It is one of the commander's chief responsibilities in any operation to determine where on that scale to start an operation and when and in which direction to shift during the operation.

The level of centralization of any given operation, like so many other military matters, is contingent on the situation at hand. Just as forces and resources are shifted and a plan is modified in response to certain situational factors.

Not surprisingly, the factors that most influence the level of centralization before and during an operation are essentially mission, enemy, troops available, terrain, and time or "METT-T" in acronymic military parlance. It would, however, be too simplistic to leave this hypothesis with the hackneyed and evasive phrase unfortunately used too often in doctrine to avoid difficult issues: "It all depends on METT-T" factors and how a commander interprets them to determine the correct level of centralization. No formula is intended to be derived from this hypothesis. All of the factors are variables and there is no specific, mathematical relationship between them. Rather, this analysis is meant to serve, to paraphrase Clausewitz's caution to Prince Frederick William concerning any "principles of war," as a means of educating the mind of the commander and serve as a guide for his assessment of a particular tactical situation.<sup>8</sup>

The first factor requiring amplification is probably the most important one for this or any other type of military analysis--the enemy situation. Certain aspects of the enemy's composition, disposition, and intentions will require greater or lesser degrees of centralization within a given operation. The nature of the decisive point, concentration at which is the goal of military operations, is defined in the main by the enemy himself. A good definition of the difficult to define decisive point, which highlights the centrality of the enemy, is as follows:

An enemy force or asset, key terrain, critical time or combination thereof, where the applied effects of the unit's combat power will lead to accomplishment of the mission or achievement of the mission's purpose.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, then, a certain amount of intelligence is required in order to determine the decisive point and where and when to mass combat power.



If a commander has little knowledge of the enemy and is uncertain where to mass the combined effects of his forces, he must generally start the operation on the "subordinate initiative" side of the scale. It is dangerous, as von Moltke tells us, to concentrate or emphasize unity of effort at the wrong time and place.<sup>10</sup> With little available intelligence on the enemy, the commander is best served by assigning areas of responsibility to his subordinate commanders and allowing them freedom of action to determine the enemy's dispositions. Once the requisite intelligence is gained, the commander can shift up the scale of centralization and issue detailed instructions to subordinates in order to unify the necessary effort at the decisive point.

Often in battle, the result of successfully massing at the decisive point results in enemy withdrawal or flight. In this situation, the commander can shift again toward subordinate initiative because the enemy's dispositions and actions have become vague and unpredictable. Once again, subordinate commanders can be assigned areas of responsibility and freedom of action to develop the fluid situation.

By inference we can see that if, at the beginning of an operation, the commander has sufficient information about the enemy to determine where concentration is necessary, he may start the operation on the "unity of effort" side of the scale. He may issue detailed orders to start the operation and again shift back toward the "subordinate initiative" side if the enemy situation becomes unclear, as it often does in a pursuit.

An illustrative example of the situation outlines above is the movement to contact. This mission is conducted by definition to determine and develop the enemy situation. At battalion level, the commander designates an advance guard company (or companies depending on the width of the zone), supplements its organic strength with combat

support elements, then allows that element all but unrestricted freedom to develop the situation. The remaining companies are essentially in reserve awaiting developments, the whole battalion clearly on the "subordinate initiative" side of the scale.

The advance guard makes initial contact and develops the situation, which includes determining the enemy's dispositions. Now equipped with a relatively clear picture of the enemy, the commander issues detailed orders to bring the battalion's combat power to bear at the decisive point and thus shifts to the "unity of effort" side of the scale. As the enemy attempts to withdraw, the commander "loosens the reins" and shifts down the scale to allow subordinate freedom of action in the unpredictable conditions of the pursuit.

The purpose of unifying subordinate effort at the decisive point is to ensure the requisite combat power is concentrated correctly in space and time. The second facet, then, of the enemy situation that drives the level of centralization is the overall combat power ratio. If the commander ascertains that he has overwhelming combat power and one subordinate element has sufficient mass to ensure success at the decisive point, then he can start such an operation on the "subordinate initiative" side of the scale because the coordination of multiple subordinate units' activities is not necessary.

The commander can, in these circumstances, task organize his combat service and service support elements to ensure the subordinate maneuver commanders have sufficient assets to accomplish their missions, then leave them relatively free to execute in assigned zones in their own manner. Only if the situation develops where the combined effect of two or more subordinate elements is required or combined arms effects beyond those available to a subordinate commander are necessary, should the

commander consider shifting toward the "unity of effort" side and issue detailed instructions.

With a less than optimal combat power ration, a commander may elect to stay more toward the side of subordinate initiative if the enemy is "on his heels." That is, the enemy force is in a hasty and ill-prepared position, vulnerable to attack and the friendly force has momentum. A delay in operations to issue detailed orders may not be desirable as it would allow the enemy time to prepare adequately. In this circumstance the commander may elect to give subordinate commanders general guidance and allow them to continue on their own initiative.

The next most important of the METT-T factors in determining level of centralization is troops available. This determinant is at the root, albeit unconsciously, of why the U.S. Army normally operates well over onto the "unity of effort" side of the scale or, more accurately, why it operates away from the subordinate initiative side of the scale.

"Troops available" in our context of determining level of centralization, implies the skill, capabilities, mutual familiarity and cohesion of individuals, staffs and units. In general, the more familiar a commander is with his subordinate commanders, the further on the "subordinate initiative side" he can operate. This is not only because the subordinates understand what the commander wants without him stating it, but also because through long association in training and combat, the commander has a good idea of how a particular subordinate will execute a given mission. The commander, therefore, has only to give the mission and the method of execution is implied. Only if the subordinate commander's modus operandi is inappropriate for the given situation does the commander need to issue specific details, other factors being equal.

A commander may also be well on the "subordinate initiative" side of the scale with one subordinate and a little less or even of the "unity

of effort" side with another depending on how familiar the commander is with each. Obviously, the capability of subordinate commanders is an important aspect also. A particular commander may require detailed orders all the time and another only when other METT-T factors require them.

The considerations of familiarity and capability apply to units as well as commanders. A commander will issue much more detailed orders to a newly attached unit than he will to an organic unit. A unit that is unfamiliar with a particular mission may need more details than for another, more familiar task.

If the commander himself is new to the unit he might consider initially issuing detailed orders until the unit as a whole becomes used to and skilled at his methods. It is vital to understand that the issuance of detailed orders not be a matter of personal preference or command style. Once a commander is satisfied with the unit's familiarity with him, he should then assess all the other METT-T factors when determining what level of centralization a situation requires. Both "loose reins" and "tight reins" approaches, if misapplied because of the commander's personal preference, can be disastrous as any other mis-analyzed factor in a tactical situation.

The U.S. Army's individual replacement personnel system makes exceptional unit capability over the long term all but impossible. Further, the rapid turnover of soldiers, commanders and leaders makes true cohesion an almost nonexistent phenomenon. Ingrained in the psyche of any U.S. commander is the fact that in any given situation at any particular time, his unit has a large number of new soldiers and leaders, often including himself. He therefore tends to issue detailed orders to ensure that the unit understands how he wants the unit to execute the mission.

Detailed orders in of themselves are not bad. However, they are not called for in many situations. If, as the U.S. Army tends to, a unit always operates under detailed orders, not only will they fail in many circumstances as no order can anticipate everything, but more significantly, the unit's leaders will not know how to operate on their own initiative. This is the danger of the U.S. Army faces under its current personnel system.

Mission is the next factor in determining level of centralization. A complex mission that requires the detailed coordination among multiple units for the sake of requisite mass or combined arms' effect will tend to require more "unity of effort" in the nature of the order. However, if subordinate units are properly task organized and have enough combat power to obviate the need for massing the effects of multiple units, then even the most complex missions can be left to the initiative of subordinate commanders if all the other factors are essentially equal.

An obstacle breach operation provides the best example of the nature of the mission impacting on the level of centralization. Using a battalion task force as a vehicle for discussion, a battalion commander will often find it necessary to mass the effects of multiple companies to achieve the necessary mass at the breach point. One company serves as the support element to suppress the local enemy; one serves as the breach element, often task organized with engineers; and one company as the assault element to attach through the obstacle once the breach is effected. Clearly, the activities of each of these forces must be coordinated in precise detail because of the inherent difficulty of the mission. The battalion commander can allow little subordinate latitude during the execution of this type operation.

However, the nature of the obstacle to be breached and the related enemy situation may be such that a single subordinate company has enough combat power to conduct the operation on its own. The battalion commander may elect, again, all other factors being equal, to augment the company with other forces specifically engineers and mortars, and allow that company commander full latitude to accomplish the mission. This latter scenario is, in fact, doctrinally called a battalion "in-stride" breach and the previous breach method is called a battalion "deliberate" breach. The difference between the two types being the level of centralization and combat power involved.<sup>11</sup>

The METT-T factor of terrain is significant in determining where on the centralization scale a unit should be in the course of an operation, only in its impact on the nature of the mission. That is, difficult terrain makes relatively simple missions more complex. Close forest, darkness or limited visibility, and urban environs for example, all make even the least complicated tasks more challenging. In these circumstances the commander, weighing the other factors, may elect to restrict subordinate initiative in order to ensure unity of effort for all or part of an operation.

Conversely, open terrain often eases the difficulty of coordination between units. This fact may induce a commander to allow more freedom of action to his subordinate leaders in a mission that might otherwise restrict it. The most important point about terrain is that it is significant in this context only in its influence on the nature of the mission itself.

The final factor of METT-T is one of the most important in all military planning and, yet, in our context the most ambiguous. The length of time available to prepare for and plan an operation does indeed figure into an analysis of the initial level of centralization for a

given operation. However, a shortage of time to plan and prepare may serve to increase or decrease the level of centralization depending on an analysis of the other METT factors.

A shortage of preparation time may serve in general to increase the level of centralization at the start of an operation. Given the nature of his subordinates, in this instance the commander may elect to issue very detailed instructions to ensure unity of effort in the absence of planning time for his subordinate leaders. Often, in time constrained situations, the commander cannot rely on the normal methods of "checks" on his subordinates, rehearsals and briefbacks as time may not be available to conduct them.

The previous scenario implies some detailed knowledge of the enemy situation. Often, however, in time constrained situations, reconnaissance is lacking and therefore the unit dispositions and intentions. As stated earlier, the enemy situation should drive all planning, and therefore the enemy factor of METT-T, as outlined earlier applies here. That is, when shortage of time prevents adequate reconnaissance, the commander should be on the side of the scale emphasizing subordinate initiative until the enemy situation crystallizes.

In conclusion, the ramifications of the analysis of each factor described in this hypothesis, when taken individually, are almost self evident. Taken as a whole, these factors describe the analysis a commander must constantly make throughout the planning, preparation and execution of any operation. The issue of appropriate centralization is decidedly more complex than simply selecting a particular command method. Certainly, the methods described by Simpkin and others and unthinkingly adopted into doctrine, do not begin to explain to a commander how to

balance unity of effort and subordinate initiative in order to achieve mass at the decisive point.

This hypothesis of the nature of command in terms of the sliding scale of centralization, serves, if nothing else, to show that the issue is far more involved than merely the question of mission or detailed orders. The appropriate level of centralization for and during an operation will probably require both methods and often, variations that fall between them. Further, the doctrinal adoption of a particular method belies the nature of the whole phenomenon of balancing unity of effort and subordinate initiative which may very well be the essential part of the art of command.



## CHAPTER 4

### HISTORICAL SURVEY

Direct experience is inherently too limited to form an adequate foundation either for theory or for application. . . The greater value of indirect experience lies in its greater variety and extent. "History is universal experience" -the experience not of another, but of many others under manifold conditions. Here is the rational justification for military history as the basis for theory and doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Basil Liddell Hart, Strategy

Historical analysis reveals that there is considerable support for the hypothesis that command methodology is not a matter of a single method applied uniformly, but rather a continuum of centralization that a commander transitions through in the course of a single operation. The commander determines the direction of that transition based on an analysis of the ubiquitous METT-T factors as they apply to centralization of control.

The most consequential of these factors, at least regarding this issue, are the enemy, troops available and the mission. The enemy situation is important in terms of how much intelligence is available to the commander, the nature of the decisive point as it involves an enemy force, the overall combat power ratio between friendly and enemy forces and the enemy's state of coherence. The "troops available" factor, in this case, can be defined in terms of the unit's cohesion and capability, the familiarity between senior and subordinate leaders and the difference in ability among subordinate leaders. The complexity of the mission,

both inherent and relative to unit and subordinate capabilities, is also a central factor in determining where a commander must be on the sliding scale of centralization.

The remaining factors of METT-T, terrain and time, also figure into the determination of how a particular operation should be centralized. However, these factors are generally subordinate to the three already discussed. Terrain (including weather and visibility), is a variable in adding to or subtracting from the complexity of a particular mission. Time is a variable that is dependent on the other factors. Paucity or abundance of time can drive the level of centralization up or down the scale depending on an analysis of the other METT-T factors.

Five historical vignettes: Anthony Wayne at Stony Point in 1779, Grant's 1864 campaign, von Moltke at Konniggratz in 1866, Kahalani on the Golan in 1973, and Wolseley at Tel-el-Kebir in 1882 will serve to illustrate the dependence of command methodology on the factors of METT-T. These vignettes have, as a common thread, the thinking and planning ability of the respective commander around whom the vignette is based. All have a reputation as among the finest military minds of their respective eras. These vignettes also illustrate the fact that usually one or another of the factors dominates the commander's planning in terms of the required level of centralization.

In August 1882, the preeminent Victorian troubleshooter, Sir Garnet Wolseley, arrived in Egypt to subdue a military coup d'etat led by Arabi Pasha the commander of the Egyptian Army. Wolseley's well-planned and well-executed campaign culminated in the decisive victory at Tel-el-Kebir on 13 September 1882. Many believe that this campaign, with its precise blending of prudence and daring, was "the tidiest war fought by the British army in its long history."<sup>2</sup>

Wolseley, Gilbert and Sullivan's "model of a modern major-general," said of the situation prior to the battle, "Never had I encountered a more thoroughly prepared defensive position nor more difficult odds."<sup>3</sup> The situation was indeed formidable. Arabi Pasha and his force of 25,000 infantry, artillery and cavalry had fallen back into an extensively prepared position on the heights of the Tel-el-Kebir to block the British advance into Cairo.

For four days Wolseley, his staff and commanders conducted detailed reconnaissance of the Egyptian positions. They found that the Egyptians had excellent fields of fire to their front, their left flank had a long, gradual slope leading down to the British positions. Their right flank rested on the Nile river. The reconnaissance further discovered some seventy Krupp breach loading, rapid fire artillery pieces covering the entire area and well placed and fortified vedettes that would provide early warning of a British advance.<sup>4</sup>

Wolseley, always the careful thinker and planner, had to weigh this difficult enemy situation against the mission, troops available, time and the nature of the terrain. He had available to him a force of about 14,000 British, Sikh, and Indian troops including some of the finest units in the empire. More importantly, the leaders of the British force were the "Wolseley gang," those commanders who were handpicked by Wolseley and who had served with him in previous campaigns. Wolseley describes their level of cohesion:

I know these men of men and they know me. I selected them originally because of character. We have worked long together; their familiarity with my methods and my just reliance on them relieves me of half the burden of command.<sup>5</sup>

Wolseley decided that in order to offset his paucity of numbers and his inability to assail an enemy flank, he must achieve advantage through the surprise gained by a night assault. He had the requisite

quality of troops available and adequate preparation time. The complexity of the mission and the enemy's dispositions worked against him.

In terms of centralization, the factor of mission outweighed all the others. Despite the cohesion and quality of troops and leaders, Wolseley issued minutely detailed orders. Before the attack began, each commander was given a sketch of his route and objectives and shown exactly where his unit was to go and what to do.<sup>6</sup> Wolseley felt that the inherent difficulty of assaulting a prepared position was compounded by a six mile night movement and a predawn attack. Forcing Wolseley even further along the scale toward "unity of effort," was the need to mass the effects of multiple units at specific points on the objective due to his overall inferiority of numbers.

The assault was a resounding success. After two hours of fierce fighting, dawn found the Egyptians in full retreat toward Cairo. Significantly, once the objective was taken and the enemy situation became unclear as they withdrew, Wolseley sent his cavalry division in pursuit with no instruction other than the mission to destroy enemy forces on the line toward Cairo.<sup>7</sup>

All of the METT-T factors had an influence on Wolseley's decision on where to start the operation on the centralization continuum, but the nature of the mission was the most telling. For Helmuth von Moltke during the Austrian campaign of 1866, however it would be the enemy situation that would have the greatest impact on the level of centralization.

Helmuth Graf von Moltke, the elder, one of the finest military minds in history, as the chief of the Prussian General Staff since 1857 and the de facto Prussian field commander, led the Prussian forces against Austria in June of 1866 in the second to the last campaign of

German unification. One of the primary objectives was to destroy the main Austrian army under Benedek in order to assure Prussian dominance in a future pan-German state. The mission, then, for von Moltke and the three main Prussian armies was to cross over the Lusatian Mountains into Bohemia, find and defeat the Austrian army believed to be concentrating at Olmutz.<sup>8</sup>

The Austrian Army of 1866 was considered by many military experts of the time to be among the finest in Europe. Its fine performance in victory in Denmark in 1864 and in defeat in Italy in 1859 enhanced an already excellent reputation. This reputation was especially good vis a vis the Prussians who had only taken the field once since 1815, and that a comparatively lackluster performance in the Danish campaign of 1864.<sup>9</sup>

The problem for von Moltke was to determine where the main Austrian force of 250,000 would concentrate in order to ensure that the three Prussian armies did not concentrate too early or in the wrong place. An issue for both sides was the matter of concentrating at the decisive point given the size of their forces and the commensurate strain on logistics to move and maintain such a large force. In general, the larger the force the less flexible the commander's ability to move and respond to changes in the situation. Von Moltke believed emphatically that it was an error to concentrate one's forces at anywhere but the decisive point.<sup>10</sup>

The Austrian solution was to concentrate all of its forces early, thus preventing piecemeal attack or defeat in detail and ensuring massed effects when needed. The side effect of concentrating their forces early was that the Austrians effectively established a defensive posture and surrendered the initiative to the Prussians. Given the rigid centralization of the Austrian command structure, reflecting conventional military wisdom of the age, and the seductive feel of having one's forces

massed in location as well as in effect, this disposition seemed appropriate.

The Prussians, believing that only through offensive action could a decision be reached, took a radical approach to concentration. Von Moltke's plan was to move the three main armies on separate axes into Bohemia until the concentrated Austrian forces could be located, then concentrate the combined effects of the three armies at the decisive point. In modern parlance, the Prussian Army was conducting a movement to contact on three separate axes.

Von Moltke could afford to risk defeat in detail in this departure from conventional military methodology because of the command system of the Prussian Army that came to fruition during his tenure as Chief of the General Staff. Von Moltke recognized that the nature of combat with increased lethality and larger forces entailed the development of leaders who could act independently when required. The Kriegsakademie, directly under von Moltke's control, developed leaders to company level who could operate effectively when subordinate initiative was required.<sup>11</sup>

Von Moltke could not, however, influence the leaders of the largest Prussian formations, corps and armies, in the same manner. These leaders were appointed by the king and "royal blood unfortunately carries no guarantee of tactical endowment."<sup>12</sup> The Prussian solution to this problem was, of course, its general staff system. This system of "institutionalized excellence"<sup>13</sup> ensured that every upper-level commander had at his right hand one of the Kriegsakademie trained officers described previously. The exceptional graduates of this institution were selected for further schooling directed and conducted by von Moltke himself. These officers were designated as "general staff" officers and assigned accordingly.

Von Moltke, then, did not have the cohesion with his subordinate commanders that Wolseley did. In fact, some of the senior Prussian generals did not even know him. "This all seems in order," said a Prussian corps commander on receiving an order from the Chief, "but who is General von Moltke?" It is certain, however, that the general staff officer, mounted next to that corps commander not only knew General von Moltke, but was trained directly by him and understood his methods.

Given this status of the "troops available" and "mission" METT-T factors, the "enemy" factor, that is where the enemy would concentrate and then where the decisive point would be, became decisive to von Moltke in determining where to be on the centralization continuum. His orders therefore gave maximum freedom of action to the army commanders who were given general lines of advance into Bohemia with the simple mission to find and fix the enemy. Then the other armies would be concentrated appropriately. "From the beginning, his advance was designed to come at Benedek, wherever he might be found from at least two directions."<sup>14</sup>

Many outsiders thought that this plan, with the independence of action granted to subordinates and their subsequent flexibility to move swiftly once the enemy was found, was ludicrous.<sup>15</sup> The Prussians did, however, find and decisively defeat the Austrians near Konniggratz (Sadowa) on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July. The plan, despite some near-disastrous hitches in execution, worked beyond the expectations of all observers, including the Prussian King.

It is illustrative to note also that while the initial plan was well over on the subordinate initiative side of the sliding scale, once the main Austrian army was found, von Moltke's orders became specific and detailed. Often, in fact, his detailed orders went directly to corps and division commanders in the critical moments just prior to the battle.<sup>16</sup> Many subordinates objected to having their initiative wrested from them

in this manner. They, like many modern commanders, did not understand that, indeed, centralization is a sliding scale that shifts as the situation changes.

Wolseley and von Moltke started their operations on different sides of the centralization continuum despite the cohesion between themselves and their subordinates that they had in common. U.S. Grant, however, encountered very different circumstances as he took command of Union forces in 1864.

In March of 1864 Lincoln appointed Grant as a lieutenant general, thus, for the first time in the Civil War, unifying all Union forces under a single command.<sup>17</sup> Grant had demonstrated the proper combination of careful planning and aggressive execution during the Vicksburg campaign in the Western theater, which Lincoln believed was necessary to win the war in toto. Grant's charge from the President was no less than the complete defeat of the Confederacy.

Grant's mission analysis resulted in the conclusion that Lee's Army of Northern Virginia was the Southern center of gravity. Therefore, the Union main effort must be Meade's Army of the Potomac in the Eastern theater. Despite his friend Sherman's urgings to the contrary, the army in the West would have to be a supporting effort.<sup>18</sup>

In terms of the "enemy" METT-T factor, Grant has to consider the capabilities of Robert E. Lee. Despite three years of relative materiel paucity, Lee had fought the Army of the Potomac to a standstill. Grant observes, "The opposing forces stood in substantially the same relations toward each other as when the war began."<sup>19</sup> Lee was by any standard the South's most capable commander and Grant accordingly felt his own effort should be expended in opposition to Lee.

Further exacerbating the problem in the East, the decisive theater, in Grant's view was that despite the victory at Gettysburg the



Eastern forces had not performed well in the last year. Possibly from resting on their Gettysburg laurels, Meade and the Army of the Potomac had again lost the moral and positional advantage to Lee. Meade and his subordinates were unknown quantities to Grant and he could only judge their abilities based on the Army's recent performance, which had not accomplished much given the resources expended.<sup>20</sup>

In sharp contrast to his assessment of Meade and his Army, was Grant's total confidence in Sherman and the Military District of the Mississippi. Sherman was a trusted subordinate and friend, while the troops in the West, Grant's former command, had proven their mettle in the battles for Vicksburg. This confidence was so strong, in fact, that on Grant's initial tour of both theaters, after only spending one day with Meade, he spent several days with Sherman planning the Union's campaign for 1864.<sup>21</sup>

The tenor and detail of Grant's respective instructions for the upcoming campaign to his two chief subordinates, Meade and Sherman, are markedly different. This difference in level of centralization is partially due to the perceived variance in the import of their respective missions; Meade the main effort and Sherman a supporting one. Primarily, however, the difference results from Grant's familiarity and confidence with one and not with the other.

Grant's April 9, 1864 orders to Meade were relatively lengthy and full of detail. He includes instructions on objectives, lines of march and how to employ subordinate formations. More telling are Grant's specific instructions on what Meade should do in several eventualities. Grant concludes this order telling Meade how much ammunition to maintain in his ordnance stores.<sup>22</sup> Clearly in this order, Grant falls on the unity of effort side of the scale. Often during the conduct of the campaign,

indeed, Grant would practice what Simpkin calls "forward command" by taking personal command of Meade's Army.

Very different in tone and level of detail is Grant's April 4<sup>th</sup> order to Sherman. Much of it is a recap of his instructions to Meade. The actual length of the instructions to Sherman is about one-third of those given to Meade. In this order is the now famous passage:

I do not propose to lay down for you a plan of campaign, but simply to lay down the work it is desirable to have done, and leave you free to execute it in your own way.<sup>23</sup>

As alluded earlier, Grant's headquarters accompanied the Army of the Potomac throughout the 1864 campaign. The net result of the operations launched in April 1864 by the orders described earlier was the capitulation of Lee and all Confederate forces by the middle of 1865. There were hitches in both theaters, some near-catastrophic, but Grant maintained his close direction of Meade, by mere presence if not directly, and his emphasis on initiative with Sherman until the final weeks of the war.

To Grant then, the factor of "troops available" was the determining factor in his initial level of centralization. The factor of "mission" is clearly another chief consideration. For Anthony Wayne planning for the attack on Stony Point, the mission, not inherently complex, but made excruciatingly so by the nature of the terrain was the critical factor in determining where on the centralization continuum he would start his operation.

Terrain as a factor in influencing command centralization, as discussed earlier, is generally significant in its impact on the complexity of the mission. The simplest mission can be made difficult by bad weather, darkness, close or unknown terrain. At Stony Point the intrepid "Mad" Anthony Wayne had to contend with both darkness and

rugged, impassable cliffs to get at the British positions at Stony Point on the Hudson River.

The epithet "mad," given to Wayne by his troops after Stony Point, belies his real character. Washington said of him, "His intrepidity in battle is only exceeded by his thoroughness in planning."<sup>24</sup> It was Wayne's combination of courage, leadership skill and planning ability that lead Washington to select him for the difficult mission of seizing the promontory of Stony Point.

General Washington summoned Wayne from convalescent leave at the end of June 1779 and gave him the mission of capturing the British positions on Stony and Verplanck's Points; two opposing positions on high bluffs overlooking the Hudson, from west and east respectively just downstream from West Point. These positions protected key British lines of communication between New England and the middle colonies. Further, from these positions, the British threatened the vital American base at West Point.<sup>25</sup>

Wayne's personal reconnaissance revealed that Stony Point was the decisive point for the whole operation. This reconnaissance also revealed the formidability of the British defenses. Their landward protection consisted of two abatis, three redoubts and extensive entrenchments with the whole protected by cannon and some five hundred veteran troops. On July 3, Wayne reported that a landward assault would not be possible and began to develop a plan for a night attack from the river side.<sup>26</sup>

The promontory itself rose steeply some 150 feet from the water and projected half a mile into the river. Three sides were surrounded by water and the fourth, the landward side, protected by a swamp in addition to the British. After further reconnaissance, Wayne concluded on 14 July that an assault on the southern face of the promontory, where the cliffs

met the shore had the best chance of success albeit at night and almost straight up the rock-strewn heights.

The troops that Wayne had at his disposal to conduct this operation were some of the best in the Continental Army. The Continental Light Corps, of which Wayne took command at West Point in mid June, consisted of 1300 troops, hand picked by Washington because of their quality and experience, organized into two brigades of troops. The officers of this unit were selected by Washington for similar reasons, but most importantly because they had served with and under Wayne in previous campaigns.<sup>27</sup>

Wayne had ample time, 30 June to 14 July, to train his units and leaders and conduct extensive reconnaissance. Yet, Wayne's final plan, issued on 14 July for execution on the night of 15-16 July, was detailed in the extreme. It consisted of "six, lengthy hand written pages"<sup>28</sup> to each commander. It included such details as how many men in each formation, distances between them and how far officers should be from their respective units.<sup>29</sup>

It is evident that the most salient feature of Wayne's METT-T analysis, were he to call it that, was the difficulty of the terrain. This was the factor that had Wayne start the operation well on the "unity of effort" side of the scale. The mission was difficult, but not so complex for the men of the Light Corps, who were all well known to Wayne and well trained and experienced. Wayne himself wrote just before the battle, "I have at my disposal the finest soldiers in the world. I only hope my detailed instructions and precise drilling have not taken their hearts from them, but the difficulty of this assault makes me leave nothing to chance."<sup>30</sup>

The assault was, of course, successful. The American casualties were exceedingly light, although Wayne himself was among the wounded,

when compared to the loss to the British of their entire garrison in killed, wounded and surrendered. "Mad" Anthony Wayne had, through careful planning and reconnaissance, won a significant victory for the rebellion. Wayne like Grant, von Moltke and Wolseley had the luxury of time for his planning and preparation. This would not be the case for Israeli Lieutenant Colonel Avigdor Kahalani as we examine the impact of the factor of time on the level of centralization.

Plenty or paucity of available planning time, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, can drive the commander's level of centralization up or down the spectrum, depending on the other METT-T variables. Obviously, abundance of time gives the commander the luxury of carefully weighing the complexity of mission, status of the enemy force and the character of his subordinate leaders and troops before decides where on the scale to start the operation. A lack of time between mission receipt and execution, tends to amplify difficulties or weaknesses in the mission, enemy situation and the troops available, and the commander will have to, as did Kahalani, balance strength against weakness to compensate for the lack of time.

Between the 6th and 9th of October, 1973 Avigdor Kahalani, commander of OZ (Courage) 77 Battalion of 7th Brigade of the Israeli Defense Forces, fought what is considered to be one of the greatest defensive battles in military history.<sup>31</sup> He executed this extraordinary action with only two hours between mission receipt and the time Syrian tanks closed within direct fire range. Kahalani's orders process is illustrative in examining how METT-T affected his level of centralization. We have the benefit of his superlative first person account of this battle contained in his book The Heights of Courage.

Kahalani, a veteran of the 1967 war, instructor at the Israeli armor school and significant contributor to Israeli doctrine, had a

relatively simple mission. He had to conduct an area defense of a portion of the Golan Heights against a Syrian armored attack. To his advantage, Kahalani would occupy positions prepared over a long period after the 1967 Israeli capture of the Golan. His tanks would have defilade positions reinforced with concrete, sited on well conceived fields of fire. The problem was that his unit's normal place of duty was the Sinai and he had only been repositioned days earlier. Consequently, only a few of his leaders were familiar with the terrain and the layout of the defensive positions.<sup>32</sup>

As is well known, the Israeli's were taken almost totally by surprise on that 6th of October. Kahalani did not, therefore, have a good appreciation for the enemy situation. What he knew was that in his sector, the Syrians had only a handful of avenues of approach and once they committed themselves to one or two, he could reposition forces to concentrate and achieve relative combat power superiority. What he did not know was that the Syrian attack would attempt to use push some 700 tanks down all the avenues of approach in his sector when they attacked at 1400 hours that day.<sup>33</sup>

As individuals and crews, the Israeli defenders of the Golan were some of the finest mounted troops in the world. On the 6th of October, however, Kahalani and two non-commissioned officers were the only combat veterans in the battalion. Further, most of the platoon leaders were new to the battalion as were two of the initial five company commanders. Kahalani had great faith in the other commanders and his executive officer.<sup>34</sup>

At 1400 hours, as Kahalani was inspecting his assembly areas enroute back to his command post from an orders group at 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, the Syrians attacked and Kahalani was ordered to occupy his defensive positions. Enroute he was ordered to new positions near Quneitra at a

place called Booster Ridge. Simultaneously, he was ordered to send one company to defend a road intersection near Waset Junction, an area not contiguous with any of the battalion positions.

Given these orders and taking artillery fire, Kahalani had to issue instructions to his companies. His level of detail to each commander differed based on all the METT-T factors. The unfolding crisis forced Kahalani to the most expedient means of controlling his operation. He ordered his two inexperienced company commanders into position with specific details on routes, individual vehicle locations and actions on contact. Kahalani followed these orders up by positioning his tank to observe these two companies. The other two companies were told to move to their positions and the general guidance "Make sure you deploy well and report contact."<sup>35</sup>

The mission at Waset Junction went to an inexperienced commander because of that company's proximity to the Junction and the urgency to have forces occupy that position. To this commander, Kahalani only gave a few brief instructions and a great deal of latitude in execution. As a check however, he eventually sent his executive officer to Waset to overwatch the action and assist the company commander there.<sup>36</sup>

As the battle progressed, Kahalani gave ever increasingly precise instructions to companies, platoons and eventually individual tanks. As wave after wave of Syrian tanks attacked, the situation became more and more chaotic. Kahalani gave very detailed instructions in order to mass his fires first at one point, then another, often giving battalion fire commands.<sup>37</sup>

Equally often, however, over the four days of the great defensive struggle, Kahalani had to send companies, platoons and sections to various critical points in the defense. He usually made sure he sent trusted subordinates and then gave them all but complete freedom of

action. Nevertheless, when concentration was required, Kahalani gave precise instructions, absolutely limiting his subordinates initiative thus ensuring unity of effort.

OZ 77 held and turned back the Syrian attack in this critical sector. For their actions, Kahalani and several of his officers received the Medal For Supreme Bravery, Israel's highest honor. Few military actions demonstrate the frequent, often frantic, movement up and down the scale between subordinate initiative and unity of effort. Most of Kahalani's orders were given on the instant, with no preparation time. In general this caused him to be more centralized, but his ability to instantly recognize when the METT-T factors changes and when, to where and to whom a shift in centralization was necessary, was vital to the success of his mission.

This brief historical survey serves to illustrate and support the hypothesis proposed in the previous chapter. We see very thoughtful and skilled commanders making conscious decisions on the level of centralization required for their respective situations. Their deliberations, while not consciously, follow the factors of mission, enemy, troops available, terrain and time. In all cases, the situation and subsequent changes in it predicated the initial and subsequent points of the continuum between unity of effort and subordinate initiative between which the operation was conducted.

Often, one METT-T factor dominated the others in initial planning, but all the factors contributed. In none of the cases did a commander's personal preference for centralized or decentralized operations override the situational factors.

As Liddell Hart alludes in the chapter's opening epigraph, the evidence of this "indirect" military experience should form the basis for military doctrine. In the next chapter we will examine the actual basis



for our doctrine, that of the German school, and show that it, too, despite recent interpretation, supports our hypothesis.

## CHAPTER 5

### AUFTRAGSTAKTIK REVISITED

The commander must permit freedom of action to his subordinates only insofar that this does not endanger the whole scheme.

Each situation dictates what should be included in the order.<sup>1</sup>

Truppenfuhrung (1936)

The U.S. Army has adopted the German concept of *Auftragstaktik* as a doctrinal precept for command and control, at least in name. The term "mission order tactics," included in several manuals since 1976, is a literal translation of the German term. Nowhere in doctrine, however, is this term defined. In fact, Army doctrine, in its interchangeable and contradictory usage of terms for "mission orders," as well as its failure to define any of them only serves to confuse rather than clarify the issue.<sup>2</sup>

In common usage in the Army, the term "mission orders" is almost exclusively used to denote decentralized command and control, where the senior gives the subordinate the mission and leaves the method to the subordinate's discretion.<sup>3</sup> The Marine Corps manual Warfighting and JCS Publication 1-02 define mission orders precisely this way.<sup>4</sup>

As an interpretation of *Auftragstaktik*, this definition of mission order tactics is incomplete and too simplistic. The notion that operations should always be decentralized, on the "subordinate initiative" side of the scale, is both a false read of *Auftragstaktik* and the nature of command methodology in general.

In the mid-1970s, General Depuy and others developed a new approach to warfighting and command methodology that is still the basis for Army doctrine. In 1982, the Army called it "Airland Battle" and at the time it was a new approach leaning toward the "maneuverist" school of warfare.<sup>5</sup> This style of fighting, the doctrinal developers believed, required a more flexible command methodology. Not surprisingly, they looked to the German experience, especially that of the Wehrmacht of World War II, for a model. General DePuy and other senior leaders thought the German command style was appropriate for the new notion of Airland Battle.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the English translation of *Auftragstaktik*, entered Army doctrine where it remains, ill-defined and therefore poorly understood, to this day.

Interestingly, the term "*Auftragstaktik*" was coined by the Germans only after World War II in an attempt to describe to Americans during after-action reviews the German Army's leadership philosophy.<sup>7</sup> This philosophy, begun during the reign of Frederick the Great, was institutionalized by the elder von Moltke and was made manifest in its best form by the Wehrmacht of World War II. The German leadership methodology has, at its heart, two basic concepts. First is the notion that it is impossible for a commander to see or predict all events on the battlefield, and therefore he must grant subordinate unit leaders enough freedom of action to respond to the exigencies of the moment. Second is the idea that subordinate leaders must take the initiative when the situation demands, even if it means disobeying orders.<sup>8</sup>

Essential to this approach to leadership is the environment in which leaders must be trained, developed, and evaluated. Contrary to popular belief, Prussian and later German leaders, at the lowest levels, were trained in an environment where independent decision making was not just something that separated a good leader from an average one, but was

a necessary characteristic for all leaders.<sup>9</sup> Rommel captures the seriousness of this training challenge when he states that leaders must take the initiative when necessary and those that only follow orders "must be ruthlessly eliminated."<sup>10</sup>

Note that the idea of the level of centralization of an operation does not enter into the definition of *Auftragstaktik*. This absence is explained by the simple fact that *Auftragstaktik* is not a command methodology as defined by Simpkin. It is rather a leadership philosophy. The term implies the overarching, holistic approach to leader development and battlefield decision making taken by the German "school."

In the German system, the level of centralization of an operation can be anywhere on the scale. The *Truppenfuehrung*, quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, clearly indicates that control by detailed order, *befehlstaktik*, is perfectly acceptable under certain circumstances. Centralized control is a recognized necessity to achieve concentration. What *Auftragstaktik* means is that even in an operation on the far end the scale toward emphasis on unity of effort, not all battlefield events can be anticipated and subordinate leaders must respond to the exigencies of the situation, within certain parameters, and not wait for orders. As von Moltke says, and it is worth quoting again:

A favourable situation will never be exploited if commanders wait for orders. The highest commander and the youngest soldier must always be conscious of the fact that omission and inactivity are worse than resorting to the wrong expedient.<sup>11</sup>

What further adds to the misunderstanding of *Auftragstaktik* as a uniformly decentralized command methodology is the nature of the German operation orders themselves. These orders were often "mission orders" in the literal sense. They were short and concise with few specified details concerning the method of execution. Modern military analysts hold up the Wehrmacht operations orders that

describe the mission and purpose and apparently leave the method of execution to the subordinate's discretion, models of correctness in maneuver warfare.<sup>12</sup> The prevalent conclusions are, therefore, that in order to execute the command methodology of *Auftragstaktik* an operation must always be conducted well over on the subordinate initiative side of the centralization scale.

This paucity of detail in some Wehrmacht orders is, however, deceptive. Certainly, as we have seen, the amount of detail in an order is only indicative of the situation in terms of METT-T at the operation's outset. Changes in these factors will cause changes in the level of centralization, the amount of detail in method of execution, given to subordinate leaders in order to concentrate at the decisive point.

The subtlety of the Wehrmacht orders process is that frequently the details in the method of execution were implicit but they were often present nonetheless. The commander could specify details concerning a subordinate's execution of a particular mission, if required by the situation, in two ways other than direct order. First, the details could come from training and second, they could come from the cohesiveness of long association.

In the Wehrmacht, the "approved method" for the conduct of a type of an operation may have been learned by leaders in the classroom and through classroom tactical exercises. In fact, one German officer asked to describe *Auftragstaktik*, stated that one of the preconditions for *Auftragstaktik* was commonly understood techniques for the execution of as many type missions as possible. "Command by means of mission directives requires uniformity of thinking."<sup>13</sup> Von Manstein echoes this hidden truth in the following:

The granting of such independence to subordinate commanders does, of course, presuppose that all members of the military hierarchy are

imbued with certain tactical or operational axioms. Only the school of the German General Staff can, I suppose, be said to have produced such a consistency of outlook.<sup>14</sup>

The second source for implicit details of execution given to subordinates in the Wehrmacht is in the long standing association of leaders with one another and their subordinates. Through the resultant cohesion of this association, the method for the conduct of a particular operation is worked out through common experience in training and in combat. Typical of this source of detail in an order is von Balck's experience at the Meuse River in 1940. Von Balck, the infantry regimental commander in a Wehrmacht division, when asked how he executed such a complicated operation with such a brief operations order replies:

As you know, we had rehearsed the overall river crossing operation in Koblenz, on the Moselle. So when we reached the Meuse the only order we got from division was, "Proceed as in the war game at Koblenz."<sup>15</sup>

We can make several conclusions at this point about *Auftragstaktik* and command methodology. First, *Auftragstaktik* is not a command methodology, but rather a leadership and training philosophy and it is not synonymous with Simpkin's "mission orders," Wehrmacht operations orders could be detailed, and thus centralized, or not regardless of the length of the actual order. As shown, the brevity of the order is not an indicator of where on the scale of centralization the operation began, nor when and to where on the scale it shifted. The centralization implied in the simple stating of a task to a subordinate unit depended on whether or not it was to be conducted in the "approved method" or a particular method dictated by unit experience or whether the method was actually left to the discretion of the subordinate commander.

Finally we can conclude that due to the nature of its leadership development, with its emphasis on individual leader initiative, training and education, the Wehrmacht was better suited than most armies in history to operate, when necessary, at the subordinate initiative side of

the spectrum. The Germans understood that rarely in battle is any leader better able to determine what is the best action to take than the man on the scent. Therefore leaders, even very junior leaders, must be trained to that responsibility.

In METT-T parlance, the Germans tried to eliminate the "troops available" factor by ensuring that their leaders, their men on the scene, were always of the highest decision making ability. Thus eliminating the need for higher commanders to ever move toward the "unity of effort" side of the scale, as we saw Grant and Kahalani do, because of the poor or unknown quality of their subordinate leaders.

It must, however, always be remembered that the Germans were firm believers in the notion of forward command.<sup>16</sup> That is a senior commander would take personal command of a subordinate unit when that unit was the main effort or fighting at the decisive point. This command methodology represents the absolute far end of the unity of effort side of the spectrum as the subordinate commander is allowed no latitude in execution. Interestingly, this practice caused little disgruntlement among subordinate commanders as the "commander's appearance in personal control," as Rommel says,<sup>17</sup> was expected at critical moments in the battle. This fact clearly indicates that the concept of *Auftragstaktik* indeed allowed for operations to be conducted throughout the spectrum of centralization.

The leadership and command style of the German Wehrmacht of World War II was the culmination of over one hundred years of Prussian and German development of the concept of *Auftragstaktik*. Two brief vignettes from this military institution will serve to demonstrate that in the Wehrmacht too, command methodology shifted up and down the scale of centralization based on the nature of and changes in the factors of METT-T.

Heinz Guderian and Erwin Rommel are two of the "great captains" of the Second World War. They are also often seen as the penultimate practitioners of decentralized command methodology. A short look at Guderian's crossing of the Meuse River in 1940 and Rommel's attacks on Tobruk in 1941 and 1942 will show that their respective levels of centralization were often at the far end of the "unity of effort" side of the scale when they took personal control of a subordinate unit. These operations are characterized by the fact that the actual level of centralization of command was always subject to the factors of METT-T.

In May of 1940, the Germans executed "Plan Yellow" and invaded France. This audacious plan featured, as the main effort, an armored attack through the Ardennes forest where French defenses and troop dispositions were weakest. Guderian's XIX Panzer Corps was the spearhead of von Kleist's Panzer Group and the central tactical unit of the operation. Von Kleist's and Guderian's overall mission was to penetrate France to the English Channel in order to split French and British forces in northern France anticipating the German advance through Belgium, a la Schlieffen, and the Allied forces and lines of communication in central and southern France.<sup>18</sup>

Guderian's corps' immediate objective was to secure crossing sites on the river Meuse between Givet and Sedan. The Meuse being the primary natural obstacle between the Ardennes and the Channel. The terrain east and west of it was relatively open and generally good tank country. The Wehrmacht saw a swift crossing of the Meuse as essential to the overall success of their plan.<sup>19</sup>

The dispositions of the French Army between the Meuse and the Ardennes were well known to Guderian and his subordinate commanders. Much of the success of the plan was staked on the weakness of French defenses facing the Ardennes. While Guderian's corps would be outnumbered in the



aggregate, especially in numbers of tanks, the Germans would be stronger on the narrow penetration to the Meuse. By the time the French could properly mass their forces, the planners believed, it would be too late, the Meuse would be crossed and the plains of northern France open to the panzers.<sup>20</sup>

The "troops available" to Guderian were exceptional in quality. The already high quality Wehrmacht panzer units, steeped in the leadership philosophy that would become known as *Auftragstaktik*, had reorganized and retrained since the Polish campaign to overcome flaws noted in after action reviews. XIXth Panzer Corp's panzer divisions, the 1st, 2d and 10th, were battle tested, mechanized, combined arms units that had worked together under Guderian for some time. Guderian's subordinate commanders down to regimental level, were a cohesive group, working together since the inception of the Wehrmacht's panzer units.<sup>21</sup>

The terrain facing Guderian was varied. The Ardennes was heavily forested and movement was restricted to a few narrow roads. As stated earlier, the open terrain between the Ardennes and the Meuse was favorable to cross-country operations by armored forces. The Meuse was a formidable barrier to mechanized forces. The Germans realized that considerable effort would be required to cross the river if opposed. The plan therefore, hoped to gain the west bank of the Meuse so rapidly, that the French would not have time to mount a coherent defense.<sup>22</sup>

The XIXth Panzer Corps had considerable preparation time for the invasion. Between February and May 1940, Guderian's units conducted extensive, multi-echelon training exercises. Include in this training was an extensive Corps level river crossing rehearsal on the Moselle near Koblenz.<sup>23</sup> During this training period "Der Schnelle Heinz" as his men affectionately called Guderian, was everywhere coaching, teaching and ensuring all subordinate leaders understood his methods.<sup>24</sup>

The attack commenced 10 May through the Ardennes. This phase of the operation was highly centralized because of the restrictive nature of the Ardennes. Movement tables were very constraining and precisely timed. Guderian allowed little subordinate initiative on the narrow congested forest tracks.<sup>25</sup>

After debouching from the Ardennes, Guderian shifted down the scale to emphasize subordinate initiative. He divided his zone of attack into three separate division zones, giving each division the mission to establish a crossing site on the Meuse. The enemy situation had degenerated in terms of predictability as French units withdrew or fled. Guderian would allow subordinates maximum freedom of action to clarify the enemy situation and find a way across the river.

About midday on the 12th of May, the 1st Panzer Division reached the east bank of the Meuse near Sedan. The enemy was in disarray on the east bank, but apparently consolidating to the west.

The 1st PzDiv did not press the attack in a *coup de main* because they were well schooled in Guderian's principle of *klotzen, nicht keckern* - "don't feel around with your fingers at several places, but hit hard with a determined fist."<sup>26</sup>

In order to hit the Meuse sufficiently hard, and prepare adequately for a complex river crossing, Guderian scheduled the attack across for the afternoon of 13 May, twenty-six hours after reaching the river. For this operation, Guderian again shifted up the scale to emphasize unity of effort. He used the preparation time to ensure precise coordination among his maneuver and supporting units and allow them time to adequately prepare.<sup>27</sup>

At 0815 on the 13th, Guderian's chief of staff issued the orders for the river crossing in a masterpiece of brevity: "Mission: Duplicate War Game Koblenz, H-hour is 1600 hours today."<sup>28</sup> This order is often touted as the epitome of the mission order, yet in reality, as we have

seen, a tremendous amount of detail to subordinate commanders regarding their method of execution is implied. The rehearsals at Koblenz were extensive and Guderian added further details in the 26 hours prior to the actual attack.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that the battlefield activities of fires, aviation and maneuver were tightly synchronized in time, in space, and in purpose by Guderian and Kleist.<sup>29</sup>

By the afternoon of the 14th of May two divisions were fighting on the west bank of the Meuse. Guderian, prompted by the fact that his subordinates were involved in their own individual fights, which they were winning, again issued detailed orders to his subordinates in order to extricate the corps as a whole for the drive west to the channel. Once the corps had broken contact and turned west, Guderian again divided his zone into division zones and allowed his subordinates considerable freedom of action to get to the channel coast.

The operations of XIXth Corps were very successful. Guderian demonstrated his ability to shift up and down the scale of centralization as the situation warranted. His success, as was that of Grant, Wolseley, Kahalani, von Moltke, and Wayne, was largely the result of this flexibility in command methodology. The ability of his subordinates to take initiative when allowed and when the situation demanded, the essence of *Auftragstaktik*, was also critical as a factor that, while related, was distinct and separate from command methodology.

Rommel's operations against Tobruk in 1941 will illustrate the use of the spectrum of centralization also, only negatively. Rommel, whose favorite technique when unity of effort was required was forward command, emphasized subordinate initiative when unity of effort was required and failed, at great cost, to take Tobruk in that year.

In February and March of 1941, the lead elements of a two division German panzer corps arrived in the Italian colonial port of

Tripoli. They were commanded by Erwin Rommel who had already demonstrated his ability to wage "maneuver" warfare in France the previous year. Rommel's mission was to defend the Italian colony of Tripolitania was an offensive against the weakened and "strung-out" British. Accordingly, Rommel attacked to the east in the last week of March.

The mission Rommel transmitted to his subordinate commanders was to find the British and destroy their forces in order to push them back into Egypt and reestablish the buffer territory of Cyrenaica.<sup>30</sup> Rommel also knew that the ports of Benghazi and Tobruk were critical to the logistics of any force operating in Cyrenaica. Control of those ports would deny their use to the enemy and assure supplies to the Axis forces.

The British, after pushing the Italians back into Tripolitania, had stripped their forces in North Africa for the ill-fated operations in Greece. The Germans had detected this weakness in Cyrenaica. Unbeknownst to the Germans, however, was that the British had a strong garrison of Australian troops manning the excellent fortifications, built by the Italians, around Tobruk.

The troops available to Rommel in March of 1941 were of the same high quality available to Guderian, only more battle seasoned. Their numbers, however were small compared to the enemy. When Rommel launched his attack, he only had available small elements of each of his two panzer divisions, and of course, the Italians who would only receive a supporting role.

Rommel had not worked with either of his division commanders before and his experience with them in the first three weeks of the offensive did not increase his confidence.<sup>31</sup> Contrarily, Rommel had great faith in many of the lower echelon commanders both because of their performance and his familiarity with them from past times.

The Sahara Desert dominates Rommel's operations in North Africa. Open terrain of this nature, all else being equal, would tend to allow a commander to operate on the subordinate initiative side of the scale, which Rommel did. However, the defenses around Tobruk were well prepared and complex. Tank ditches, infantry trenches, bunkers, wire obstacles, and mines all integrated and manned by first class troops, made any assault on Tobruk a highly risky and complex venture.<sup>32</sup>

Time was a critical factor in Rommel's deliberations. Once his offensive was under way, he avoided any pause to allow the British to consolidate. He felt that speed and constant pressure on the British withdrawal would make up for his disadvantage in overall combat power. The lack of preparation time caused Rommel to alternately take personal command of certain units or allow the commanders considerable freedom of action, thus operating at both ends of the centralization scale at the same time.

After three weeks of operations, the Afrika Korps had fought over 600 miles of desert and had cut Tobruk off from the British who were attempting to consolidate along the Egyptian border. During this period, Rommel had been operating generally on the subordinate initiative side of the scale, giving his subordinate commanders only objectives to be taken. Occasionally, Rommel would literally descend on a unit, in his aircraft, and take personal command at a critical moment.<sup>33</sup>

Rommel ordered his 5th Light Division to seize Tobruk on the 11th of April. Unlike Guderian on the Meuse, Rommel did not pause to mass and maximize the unity of effort of all his forces. He felt that the British were retreating everywhere and a swift attack on Tobruk would likely reduce that fortress-town quickly, in the same manner that Benghazi had fallen. Rommel writes: "At last I found the staff of the 5th Light Division. Soon afterwards 5th Panzer Regiment came up with twenty tanks

and the machine gun battalion; they were immediately sent in to attack Tobruk."<sup>34</sup>

This attack and all subsequent attacks by the division failed. Rommel had failed to adequately consider changes in the mission (exacerbated by the increased complexity of the terrain), the enemy situation and in his troops available and accordingly adjust his level of centralization.

Since inadequate reconnaissance and intelligence collection were directed against Tobruk, Rommel did not know the complexity or difficulty of the Australian defensive position. The Australians had prepared well and had considerable antitank capability. Further the British were determined to hold Tobruk, if for nothing else, the morale effect on the British home front.

Finally, in terms of the enemy situation, an assessment of relative combat power would probably have driven Rommel to maximize unity of effort of all his corps' assets to seize Tobruk. A brief operational pause, a la Guderian on the Meuse, would have allowed the Afrika Korps to attack with its full weight.

Rommel did not take into account two factors in his troops available beyond his paucity of numbers which he justifiably felt he could offset with momentum. First, his troops were exhausted both logistically and physically.<sup>35</sup> A difficult mission like the assault of a strong-point requires relatively fresh troops.

The second and most significant factor in terms of centralization was the quality and ability of the division and tank regiment commanders to whom he had given the mission. Johannes Streich and Hermann Olbrich had not performed to Rommel's standards in the first weeks of the campaign and Rommel would later relieve them both from command.<sup>36</sup>

Allowing these substandard commanders that amount of latitude proved disastrous.

When Rommel finally captured Tobruk in 1942, he corrected all of the flaws in his previous attempts, the attack was conducted well over on the unity of effort side and the full weight of the Afrika Korps and its supporting arms was brought to bear. Rommel had clearly learned his lesson on the limitations on subordinate initiative.

As we have shown, *Auftragstaktik* is not a command methodology in the Simpkin definition. It is a leadership philosophy that promotes leader initiative on the battlefield. The Germans understood that it is ineffectual to simply tell subordinates to take initiative when the situation demands. In order to operate with emphasis on subordinate initiative, leaders must be raised in an environment that not only allows deviation from orders but insists upon it under certain circumstances, with the nature of those circumstances clearly understood.

German command philosophy included the entire span of the centralization continuum. They were well prepared to operate equally on the subordinate initiative side and at the extreme end of the unity of effort side through the idea of forward command. The success of the Wehrmacht was not that they used mission orders, but rather they understood the true nature of command methodology and could effectively shift up and down the centralization scale as the situation demanded.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Doctrine cannot equip the mind with formulas for solving problems, nor can it mark the narrow path on which the sole solution is supposed to lie by planting a hedge of principles on either side. But doctrine can give the mind insight into battle's great mass of phenomena and their relationships, then leave the mind free to rise into the higher realms of action. Then the mind can use its innate talents to capacity, combining all to seize on what is right and true--seemingly more a response to the immediate challenge than a product of thought.<sup>1</sup>

von Clausewitz, On War

This thesis has attempted to describe the mass of phenomena associated with the centralization of command. As Clausewitz states, that is the function of doctrine. Not only is it a false understanding of command methodology for doctrine to select a specific command methodology, such as "mission order tactics," but it is an attempt to plant a "hedgerow" toward the "sole solution" of the level to which a commander centralizes his operation.

War has one certainty and that is uncertainty. All of doctrine and historic precedent agree that decision making on the battlefield, therefore, must be pushed down, not to the lowest level, but to the lowest appropriate level. Determining that level is one of the commander's chief responsibilities. Not surprisingly, the factors of METT-T applied to centralization provide the commander the variables to consider before and during each operation.

Command is not a matter of discrete methodologies to be applied institutionally as Simpkin would suggest. Neither is command, in terms



of the level of centralization, a matter of personal preference. Command is a continuum of centralization along which a commander transits based upon changes in the immediate situation as defined by the factors of METT-T. These factors have particular properties when applied to analyzing whether to emphasize subordinate initiative or unity and effort and if so by how much.

The U.S. Army espouses mission order tactics in its doctrine. But, what it really means to emphasize is the holistic leadership philosophy of *Auftragstaktik*. This concept, however, cannot be seen simply applied to battlefield doctrine. It must permeate training, leader development, evaluation, promotion and personnel policy.

The Army's personnel system, that of individual replacement, unless it is changed, will tend to drive the level of centralization of operations toward the unity of effort side and promote control by detailed orders. This is true because in the vast majority of units embarking on an exercise or real mission will have many new subordinate leaders or a new commander. The resultant unfamiliarity and lack of true cohesion will force commanders to generally be more detailed and more reticent to operate on the subordinate initiative side of the scale, all else being equal. Until this personnel system is overhauled, the concept of *Auftragstaktik* in the U.S. Army is a pipe dream.

This is not to imply that control by detailed order is wrong or not appropriate. On the contrary, this thesis has demonstrated that not only are detailed orders acceptable, but under certain circumstances this type of control is required. If, as is the case in many Army units, the commander is unfamiliar with his subordinates he often should operate further toward the unity of effort side of the scale.

Army doctrine does support operating along the spectrum of centralization through its concept of the commander's intent. This

concept, albeit often abused and misunderstood, provides an overarching framework for all operations regardless of where on the centralization scale they are conducted. Since no operation in war ever goes exactly as planned, regardless of how tight the control of the commander, success in battle often revolves around the ability of subordinate leaders to make independent decisions to take advantage of some local battlefield event. Commander's intent is designed to provide that leader the parameters within which his decision is good and conducive to the success of the overall mission.

By way of recommendation, Army doctrine, especially FM 100-5, Operations, should explain the nature of command methodology as discussed in this thesis, in order to provide commanders with an understanding of the phenomena that drive the level of centralization. The simple inclusion in doctrine of buzzwords and catch-phrases such as "mission orders" and "decentralized operations" in the hope that commanders understand the implicit concept is ineffective.

Other doctrinal manuals, such as FM 01-5, The Tactical Decision Making Process, should also explain how a commander determines his level of centralization and how that level translates into commander's guidance to his staff and subordinate commanders. The current "checklist" of the battlefield operating systems for outlining this guidance does not scratch the surface of the complex phenomena of battlefield decision making.

Finally, the Army, if it truly wants to pursue *Auftragstaktik* as an institutional goal, must relook its leader promotion and evaluation system. The idea that a particular leader "takes initiative" can no longer be a discriminator between average and above average leaders. Taking initiative in the sense of contravening orders in the face of a changed situation should be a baseline requirement for all leaders. No

leader should be promoted if they simply succeed through obedience to the last order given.

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<sup>34</sup>Erwin Rommel, The Rommel Papers (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953), 123.

<sup>35</sup>David Irving, The Trial of the Fox (New York: Avon Books, 1977), 103.

<sup>36</sup>ibid., 124.

## Chapter 6

<sup>1</sup>Carl von Clausewitz, Attributed.

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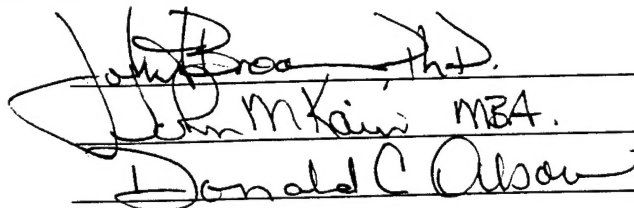
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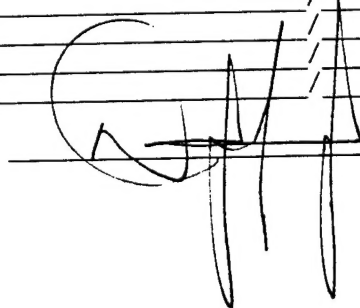
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